

Amherst Council on Aging

2010 Survey of Amherst Residents Over 50

Every ten years since 1970 the Amherst Council on Aging has conducted a survey of older residents in Amherst. The aim of these surveys has been to find better ways to serve Amherst seniors and to anticipate their needs in future planning. In the past only residents over 60 were surveyed and the surveys were carried out under the direct supervision of the COA. In contrast, the 2010 Survey included residents in the age group 50 to 59 as well as those over 60 and was conducted by Dr. Randall Stokes of the Social and Demographics Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts. These changes were made because, in an era of decreasing funding and a changing elder population, the Council on Aging saw a need for a more detailed and more professional survey than had been conducted in the past. The Council on Aging is extremely grateful to Dr. Stokes for donating his time and doing the work pro bono. The services of the Social and Demographics Research Institute were likewise donated.

Dr. Randall's Report on the 2010 Survey is based upon the 735 responses to 1800 questionnaires that were sent out – a 41% response rate. The questionnaire itself was organized around six broad areas of concern:

- utilization and adequacy of the services provided by the Amherst Senior Center
- receiving care from others
- care giving
- social networks
- general characteristics and conditions of the elder and midlife populations of Amherst
- the future

Because the Report on the Survey is lengthy, the Council on Aging thought it useful to preface the Report with a list of the key points. The list of key points can also be found at the end of the Report on pages 36-38.

Several items are particularly significant.

- We learned that although many Amherst elders are well educated and financially secure, about one-quarter of elders are financially strapped and 'living on the edge'. *To that group our services are invaluable.*
- We learned that the 50-59 year olds are more anxious about the future than the older age group. *That could mean the need for more support services in the future.*
- We learned that about one quarter of respondents care for another person. Of those 40% find it 'difficult' or 'very difficult'. *We need to find ways to support those people.*
- We learned that the Senior Center is used by two-thirds of residents over 70 and they are overwhelmingly appreciative of the services provided.

The Council on Aging remains committed to its charge of identifying and advocating for the needs of the aging population. The 2010 Survey will be invaluable in this endeavor.